

Testimony of Cay Freeman, Public School Teacher, Before the Education Committee
Opposition to H.B. 5078
March 12, 2014

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, my name is Catherine Freeman, and I am a Math Intervention Teacher at Sage Park Middle School in Windsor. I am writing to you today to share my experiences with the Common Core, and the powerful learning that it has brought to my classroom and to my students. I have seen how the Common Core State Standards help teachers set a higher bar for learning, and our students are responding. But these higher standards represent a whole new way of teaching and learning, and they will take time to master. It is for that reason that I oppose the delay of implementation proposed by H.B. 5078.

I have been teaching for 28 years, and I have never been more passionate about education than I am now. When I first became a teacher I would spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to challenge my students with disabilities. But learning about the Common Core State Standards has made me their fervent advocate. These new standards are a chance for all students K-12, in every district of every state, to be challenged to learn at the high levels they need in order to succeed in the increasingly complex post-secondary world that awaits them.

Let me tell you why the standards are great for teachers: I teach middle school students who have difficulty with math. But even though I teach students who already struggled with our prior standards, I embrace these new, more rigorous math standards. Why? Because the Common Core marks a shift away from the "mile wide, inch deep" curriculum of old. Instead, it focuses on only what is crucial for students to learn and know at each grade. Common Core has brought standards in line with what students in other highly successful countries learn at the same grade levels. This focus is what my students, and I, need.

Focus gives me the gift of time - more time to spend on each standard - which allows for more opportunities to bring in additional resources, and time for discussion to build conceptual understanding as well as procedural mastery. Teachers now have the time to demonstrate different ways to approach problems, and recognize and embrace varied ways of solving them.

The standards have also allowed – for the first time in history – for the development of one big, national professional learning community. With most states adopting Common Core, we have the unique opportunity to truly be collaborative as never before. Now that we share a common set of standards, educators all across the country can share best practices as we find the most effective ways to develop and implement lessons that teach to these standards. This is a wonderful resource for teachers.

But the Common Core State Standards are also great for students. In my classroom, the standards permit students to see different ways to think of a problem, and the mathematical sense behind

the solutions. They learn that there's more than one way to get "the answer", and they can choose the way that makes the most sense to them. One of my sixth graders, after a successful lesson on splitting numbers into parts before multiplying, recently confided that "I never got how to do this before; I always forgot what to do next." This student now confidently multiplies two-digit numbers, a fourth grade skill he finally learned in the sixth grade with Common Core-aligned teaching methods.

With the Common Core, we are no longer teaching kids just how to get the answer, we're teaching them the math – the understanding that goes beyond any one answer.

It used to be that if you were good at memorization, then you were good at math class. But with these new standards, successful students will no longer be mere recipients of information; they can no longer be passive in the math class. Now, successful students will be the ones who can problem solve, think critically and creatively, recognize patterns and reason mathematically. Students will be expected to explain, with accurate mathematical reasoning, *how* they got their answer and *why* it is correct – and discuss why other solutions would and would not work. And these are exactly the skills that our students will need as they consider their options upon graduation. Unfortunately, our prior state standards have not done a good job of preparing them for this postsecondary world.

Now, I recognize that implementation of the Common Core has been and will be challenging. We are asking teachers to be prepared to teach in a way that leads to true conceptual understanding; this represents a shift in practice for many. Furthermore, it will take time for this focus on fewer standards to be fully realized because today's students have not had the benefit of Common Core instruction in previous grades. For now, this means each teacher must help students to catch up. We are asking a lot of our teachers. However, with more time for professional development and ongoing support, this difficult period will not persist beyond another year or two as students get on track with the Common Core learning progression.

As a mother whose two sons went through the public schools, I just wish that they had been given the benefit of these new, higher level standards. I think they would have enjoyed the challenge. I know my students do. I don't think there's a teacher in America who doesn't want his or her students to be successful on a global scale.

We need to give teachers the time and the training they need to understand and embrace these new standards. Any change, especially a change of this magnitude, is difficult. Let's not abandon the Common Core Standards because they're hard. Let's continue and increase our efforts at making them succeed.

I am strongly opposed to delaying the implementation of these standards. Our children need this new type of teaching and learning as soon as possible. We cannot allow mistrust, misunderstanding, and misinformation to drown out the reasoned and informed discourse that must take place. We owe our children more resilience than that.